

36. SOME OBSERVATIONS OF SCARCE BIRDS IN KERALA AND TAMIL NADU

In January and February 1985 we, together with N. Simpson, visited southern India to watch birds. A variety of habitats was visited and in particular our attention was concentrated on the endemic avifauna (Harrap and Redman *in prep.*). Observations were also made of four species which are scarce or previously unrecorded in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and these are documented below. The opportunity has also been taken to include recent related records by other observers (all records are the authors' unless otherwise indicated).

Redwinged Crested Cuckoo *Clamator coromandus*: One was seen 16 Km west of Munnar, Kerala, on 31 January 1985 near the Cochin road at about 1000 m on the southern flanks of the High Range. It was moving slowly through ground-storey vegetation in evergreen forest.

Its status in the peninsula is 'very imperfectly known or understood' (Ali & Ripley 1983). For Kerala, Ali (1969) gives a suite of records indicating that it is a scarce but regular winter visitor throughout the state. Our sighting fits well with this pattern.

Kashmir Redbreasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa subrubra*: A male was seen by R. Grimmett and C. Robson at Ootacamund (Ooty) in the Nilgiri Hills, Tamil Nadu, at about 2250 m on the edge of a relict stand of montane forest amidst pine and eucalyptus plantations on 4 and 5 February 1984, and a female was seen there on the latter-date. Two males were observed by us at the same site on 8 February 1985, with another two males 3 km away on the edge of scrub adjacent to the Avalanche road. Finally, a male was observed at the original Ooty site by K. Derbyshire and J. Eames on 10 December 1986.

The males were easily distinguished from Redbreasted Flycatcher *M. parva* by extensive orange-red on the throat, breast and upper belly, bordered by a black line along the lower edge of the ear coverts and the sides of the breast, extending diffusely onto the flanks. Notably, the head and mantle were smoky blue-grey and the bill conspicuously pinkish-orange, only slightly darker along the culmen, features not adequately covered by Ali & Ripley (1983) where the male is described as dark grey-brown above and the bill brown, with only the lower mandible yellow.

The Kashmir Redbreasted Flycatcher winters in Sri Lanka above about 750 m in gardens, tea estates, borders of forest etc., but is scarce on passage in the peninsula and apparently not previously recorded in Tamil Nadu or Kerala (Ali & Ripley 1983). The presence of birds at Ooty in three different years indicates that the species winters regularly in the Nilgiris, and perhaps the whole of

the Western Ghats complex. Why it should have been previously unrecorded is not clear, though S.C. Madge (in litt.) notes that some males are poorly marked and easily passed off as *M. parva*.

Tytler's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus tytleri*: Two birds were observed above Vagavurrai, 20 km northeast of Munnar, Kerala on 2 February 1985 at about 2000 m on the slopes bordering the Eravikulam Plateau. They were feeding actively in the middle-storey on the edge of a *shola*. Due to the difficulties of identifying *Phylloscopus* warblers, their appearance will be discussed in detail.

Description: Size and shape similar to a Dull Green Leaf Warbler *P. trochiloides* (i.e. about 10 cm). Crown, mantle, rump and wing coverts dull olive-grey. A narrow but well-defined whitish supercilium contrasted with the dark eyestripe. Remiges and rectrices dark olive-brown, on one individual fringed bright olive-green. Underparts off-white lightly sullied with grey, and with a touch of yellow in the centre of the breast and on the undertail coverts. Bill not noticeably long, but slender, blackish and with a very small pale base to the lower mandible. Legs mid- to pale grey. Call a hoarse, squeaky *huweest*.

Discussion: In fresh plumage, Tytler's Leaf Warbler is greyish-olive above, remiges and rectrices dark brown fringed with olive-green, underparts yellowish-white streaked brighter yellow. In first winter plumage they are greener above and yellower below. Worn birds are grey-brown above and dirty white below (Ticehurst 1938, Williamson 1967, Inskipp & Inskipp 1985). Particularly, in worn plumage, confusion is possible with Largebilled *P. magnirostris*, Dull Green *P. trochiloides* and Bright Green Leaf Warblers *P. (t.) nitidus*, all of which are common winter visitors to peninsular India. All three species can be excluded by a combination of the following characters:

1. Absence of wingbar. The three species show a narrow pale wingbar on the tips of the greater coverts, although in worn plumage this may be absent. The bright green fringes to the remiges of one of the Vagavurrai birds indicate that these feathers and their coverts were relatively fresh and unabraded and that they did not therefore show wingbars in fresh plumage.

2. Slender, all-dark bill. Inskipp & Inskipp (1985) state that a more slender and all-darkish bill separates Tytler's from a worn Dull Green Leaf Warbler, and indeed Dull Green (of the forms *ludlowi* and *viridanus*) and Bright Green Leaf Warblers always show a prominent pale base to the lower mandible. However, *P. t. trochiloides*, which is rare south of the Gangetic plain, can show a

predominantly dark lower mandible (pers. obs. and R. Grimmett *pers. comm.*). Interestingly in this context, Alexander (1955) gives details of Dull Green Leaf Warblers seen at Ootacamund with all-darkish bills. The Largebilled Leaf Warbler has a long and stout bill, the lower mandible with a variable pale base, although usually darker in the breeding season and dark in skins (Ticehurst 1938). Statements in the literature that Tytler's Leaf Warbler has a very long bill appear to be erroneous; it is only marginally, if at all, longer than that of the dull Green Leaf Warbler (12–14 mm for Tytler's, 11.5–14.5 mm for Dull Green (Ticehurst 1938, Williamson 1967). The slender profile is, however, distinctive.

3. Call — all three species can be excluded by call. The Largebilled Leaf Warbler has a very distinctive, stereotyped call (Ali & Ripley 1983 and pers. obs.). Bright and Dull Green Leaf Warblers share very similar, unequivocally disyllabic calls, a *chee—wee* or *tiss—yip* (Dean 1985 and pers. obs.). Unfortunately we are unfamiliar with the call of Tytler's Leaf Warbler, which is usually described as a single feeble note and a double *y—it* (Inskipp & Inskipp 1985).

The winter range of Tytler's Leaf Warbler is poorly known, but the few records include two from the Nilgiris and it is generally believed to comprise the Western Ghats complex (Ali & Ripley 1983). Our observations support this hypothesis. The difficulty of identifying birds in their winter quarters perhaps explains the dearth of records.

ALEXANDER, H.G. (1955): Field-notes on some Asian leaf warblers - 1 *Brit. Birds* 48: 293 - 99.

ALI, S. (1969): Birds of Kerala. Second Edition. Delhi.

——— & RIPLEY, S.D. (1983): Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan. Compact Edition. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

DEAN, A.R. (1985): Review of the British status and

Dark Thrush *Turdus obscurus*: One was seen on 4 February 1984 by C. Robson at Ootacamund at about 2250 m in a relict stand of montane forest amidst pine and eucalyptus plantations. One was seen on 23 January 1985 by SCH at Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu, in scrub immediately inland of the coast. The combination of a prominent pale supercilium and variable buff or peachy flanks and breast and distinguish this thrush.

The Dark Thrush is a common winter visitor to the Indian subcontinent from Bangladesh eastwards. The above records appear to be the first from Tamil Nadu but, together with four recent winter records from Nepal (Inskipp & Inskipp 1985) and a record from northwest Karnataka (Ali & Ripley 1983), may indicate that the species is a rare, but regular straggler to other parts of the subcontinent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank R. Grimmett and C. Robson for their expert advice in planning our trip and provision of their records. J. Eames also supplied us with details of his observations and S.C. Madge kindly commented on a draft of this note.

S.C. HARRAP
N.J. REDMAN

October 29, 1987.

REFERENCES

identification of Greenish Warbler. *Brit. Birds* 78: 437 - 451.

INSKIPP, C., & INSKIPP, T. (1985): A guide to the birds of Nepal, London.

TICEHURST, C.B. (1938): A systematic review of the genus *Phylloscopus*. London.

WILLIAMSON, K. (1967): Identification for ringers, 2. The genus *Phylloscopus*. Revised Edition. Tring, U.K.

37. ADDITIONAL RECORD ON MORTALITY FROM HAILSTORM AT JAIPUR

On 8 May 1987, at around 1630 hrs, a heavy hailstorm hit some parts of Jaipur city, Rajasthan. The effect of this hailstorm, which lasted more than an hour, was very severe inside the campus of Rajasthan University at Jaipur. The weight of the hailstones varied from 100 to 150 gm. Considerable damage was caused to the fauna and flora of this area. A number of trees like *Polyalthia longifolia*, *Delonix regia*, *Cassia fistula*, *Azadirachta indica* were damaged. The next morning we recorded dead bodies of several species of common birds and some mammals. They were Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, Red

wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*, Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*, Roseringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, Ringdove *Streptopelia decaocto*, Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*, House Crow *Corvus splendens*, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Spotted Owlet *Athene bramma* and Five-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennanti*.

October 18, 1987.

B. RAM MANOHAR
M. RAJASEKARAN